

Bill proposal 5076 LCO No. 62

"An act concerning an appropriation for a fetal and infant mortality review program"

Susan Phillips Plese, Manchester, CT

Good morning, Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Susan Phillips Plese. I am a resident of Manchester and a member of the Community Action Team for the Manchester/Vernon FIMR. I am speaking today in support of the Fetal and Infant Mortality Program, bill proposal 5076 LCO No. 62, called "An act concerning an appropriation for a fetal and infant mortality review program."

I am 60 years old, and the mother of three grown children. I have two little granddaughters. The older, Meghan who is 2 1/2, is my curly-headed jewel, my funny little treasure.

The younger, Sofiya, died in her mother's womb, five days after her due date last August. It took my daughter-in-law Sveta three days to deliver her dead baby; afterward, stunned and trembling, my son and daughter-in-law cuddled her, stroked her tiny limbs and fuzzy head, and buried her. Sveta was a healthy, exuberant mother; I called her "sunshine Madonna." No one could tell her why Sofiya died.

This is the strongest argument in favor of FIMR that I can imagine. FIMR has worked at the grass-roots level, interviewing families after the death of an infant, looking for common threads, seeking to prevent another family from the anguish of holding a tiny body so full of joy – then putting her in the ground.

FIMR hasn't just investigated and gathered statistics; it is proactive. In October the American Medical Association announced that premature birth was the leading cause of infant mortality, replacing birth defects.

But FIMR was already on the streets, promoting prenatal care, smoking cessation, treatment for maternal depression, high blood pressure and obesity, the causes of many premature births.

Already FIMR and its affiliates had distributed brochures and pamphlets targeted to women who weren't even pregnant yet, advocating women's health for life, not just while pregnant. They have introduced information about the need for folic acid both before and during pregnancies, to reduce the incidence of spinal cord malformations, including spinal bifida. FIMR in Manchester/Vernon alone has a volunteer staff of more than 30 medical specialists and activists coordinated by one woman, who is granted just \$25,000 a year to administer the entire program.

Health professionals have flocked to her and immersed themselves in the business of preventing the death of babies.

What could be more elemental?

The death of any child is a horrible tragedy that sends waves of sorrow to engulf an entire family. The wounds do not heal. I don't mean to be arrogant, but unless you have experienced it, you don't know how far into your heart that pain pierces and sears.

Research is necessary, of course; but ongoing research in individual cities cannot be replaced with an umbrella agency, especially because so much action has already taken place, boots on the ground, as they say in the military.

When FIMR comes to you, when FIMR asks for what amounts to the state's pocket change to continue to save little babies, please think of the bottom line.

The bottom line is not written in dollars. The bottom line is spelled Sofiya, my granddaughter. You won't forget her, will you.

It is an honor to testify for such an important cause. I sincerely hope you will support the work of FIMR, now and in the future. Thank you for taking the time to listen to my story, that is but one of many similar tragedies.